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STATEMENT

An ode to college caffeination

by Iulia Dobrin
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I start most of my days with coffee. The beverage is so embedded into my schedule that if I don't start the morning with one, I get a headache by the middle of the day.

On days I have to be up before 10 a.m., I use all my willpower to get out of bed, fighting my body's signs that I'm not a morning person long enough to buy a doppio coffee — two shots of espresso, no milk or cream. I mobile-order seven minutes before I plan to leave my apartment, then make a beeline from my back door to

the front door of the Starbucks across the street. I tell the baristas to have a nice day and go through the side door into the Galleria Shopping Center and out the back entrance on the way to my car. This routine gets me out of bed those mornings, with the promise of coffee helping me stay awake long enough until the caffeine hits.

On weekends, I wander out to get coffee from local spots where I can sit and enjoy both the coffee *and* the ambiance. One Saturday is spent studying while drinking a coconut cold brew at Black Diesel, another starts with a morning coffee date sipping Roos Roast's latest special at their colorful outdoor tables while watching the passersby on Liberty Street.

I started drinking coffee freshman year of college out of what I believe was a necessity, trying to offset the late study nights and early wakeups for classes. In an effort to avoid spending copious amounts of money on caffeine, I'd get my doppio — one of the cheapest options — at any given campus cafe a few times a week, my favorite being Darwin's in the Biological Science Building. If I was feeling an actually prepared drink, I'd get the UMMA Cafe's mocha to warm me up on brisk fall days.

In retrospect, I think caffeine was not only a necessity coming to Michigan, but also a sort of rite of passage into college life. Caffeine plays such an integral role in campus culture that a **dozen** campus cafes are offered. The correlation between caffeine and **focusing** on studying can be almost **Pavlovian** at times.

A 2018 **study** conducted with five U.S. universities found that 92% of students consumed caffeine over the course of a year, compared to 89% of the general U.S. population. On campus, there's added ties to local businesses and **culture** that become a part of traditions and the overall college experience. Students rejoiced at Sweetwaters **opening** in the Union, and they mourned Espresso Royale **closing** a few months into the pandemic. Many people have a favorite study spot that involves proximity to caffeine, and many more are fans of free coffee and tea through **Welcome Wednesdays**.

Coffee gave me a way to connect with the University of Michigan campus. With my class and extracurricular schedules meaning most of my free time during the day had to be spent studying, going to coffee shops took away some of my FOMO as it allowed me to hang out with people and explore new places around Ann Arbor. I could meet up and study with friends in new locations while getting to try new coffee in the process.

Getting to try different spots and form preferences played a big part in helping me feel at home on campus freshman year. I knew the North University Panera was my best bet for coffee before my 8:30 class in the MLB, and if I was early enough my professor might be in front of me in line for coffee. The UMMA Cafe was the prime stop between South Quad and the Chemistry Building if the line wasn't too long, and I could run into my roommate heading back to our dorm as I headed to class with a coffee in hand. The Sweetwaters downtown was perfect for getting in a walk on weekends before I studied, and it gave me a chance to try

navigating downtown Ann Arbor without Google Maps (and more often than not, get lost on the way back to campus).

The connection between the U-M campus and its local coffee shops can work both ways, especially for Ann Arbor baristas who aren't Michigan students. Vertex Coffee Roasters barista Heather Quillen, who is from Ypsilanti, felt that her position gave her a connection to campus events that she wouldn't otherwise have.

"I'm definitely a lot more aware of things that are going on like with the University that I wouldn't really pick up otherwise," Quillen said. "One of our main things here is we focus on sustainability and low waste, so we have a lot of interactions with students that are focusing on those things as part of their studies."

Not everybody buys into the coffee craze. LSA senior Paige Knittel started drinking tea for the health **benefits** and because she prefers the taste of it over coffee. She now appreciates saving money by making tea at home and tries to only have caffeinated tea a couple times a week, opting for decaf most of the time.

"A lot of people talk about how much coffee they drink and how they sort of have a dependence on it, and that's one of the reasons I drink mostly decaf — because I don't want to have a dependence on caffeine," Knittel said. "People also talk about how much they spend going to Starbucks every single morning getting a coffee or something, and I don't want to spend that much money, so I usually make my own tea."

Knittel brings up an important point about the cost of caffeine. As per a 2016 **survey**, the average American spends over $20 a week on coffee. For student coffee drinkers, this presents a difficult decision: either you invest in a coffee machine early on and stick to using it, or take advantage of the convenience of over two dozen coffee shops in **close** proximity to campus at the expense of your wallet.

Although I have my own coffee machines at home, I still buy coffee at least four to five times a week, which is evident by the embarrassing amount of stars I have on the Starbucks app. I estimated my weekly cost to be around $13 dollars, although that's probably an understatement.

During the primarily online semesters of this past year, going to get a coffee became the only reason to exit my apartment most days. The benefit of the change of scenery often outweighed the unnecessary financial cost. Even when coffee shops closed or had limited seating, I would still try to get out and try a new drink at the local shops, sometimes lucky enough to find a spare seat where seating was open.

With the pandemic limiting activities on campus, getting a coffee was the main entertainment, whether I was meeting up with someone or just wanted something to do in a free hour. It was cheaper than eating out, and it

gave that extra energy boost for the rest of the day. I looked forward to the weekends when I had time for a walk to try local coffee shops like Drip House or Roos Roast.

One place on campus that had seating open throughout a part of the year is Common Cup, a nonprofit coffee shop and ministry of the University Lutheran Chapel — which they share a building with. Ministry manager Karen Berger estimated about 90% of the shop's customers are students.

"A decent number of people come and do their homework here," Berger said. "Through COVID, when we had seating open, they were doing classes online here. We do also get a decent number of people that are meeting with church mentors or meeting up with friends to have a cup of coffee."

Berger, like myself, had a harder time limiting her caffeine intake during the pandemic.

"I used to be good about restricting (my caffeine)" Berger said. "If I wasn't (at the Common Cup) I wouldn't have caffeine, and COVID kind of broke that rule. I started making coffee at home and now I'm like 'No, I need it every day.' But it is part of routine. I feel kind of weird if I haven't had coffee, and then eventually you have a headache, which is an unfortunate occurrence."

The caffeine **headache** is a catch-22: caffeine withdrawal can cause headaches when someone is dependent on caffeine, yet caffeine itself also relieves headaches. There are countless days when I don't have a coffee because I know I don't need it, only to cave by the afternoon when I know all too well why there's a dull pain in my head.

With a majority of classes being in person in the fall and coffee shops gradually opening up seating and extending hours back to pre-COVID **normalcy**, many people's caffeine habits are bound to change. There will be less dependency on a coffee machine when we have in-person classes, and all three workers I spoke to said their customer base is already primarily students, even during the pandemic.

Corin Beier, a barista at Lab Cafe, has already seen the increased traffic as restrictions have eased up, even though she says most customers still get their coffee to go.

"There's a lot more meetups, like friends, obviously reconnecting after COVID, and it's always funny to see first dates," Beier said.

As libraries open, giving students even more reason to live and study around campus, I expect more money spent on caffeine as a whole. However, it's interesting how many people consume caffeine differently. One of my roommates gets bubble tea for a caffeine kick, and the other one works at a coffee shop where she gets her

daily fix. Another one of my roommates tends to drink more tea, while one of my friends can drink a coffee pot worth of coffee before noon. My partner tends to go for energy drinks, another friend sticks to instant coffee and other friends opt for caffeine pills.

All three local coffee shops I spoke to were anticipating changes to accommodate the return to more normal times and to stay competitive amongst other options on campus. Students' coffee shop preferences, whether local or chain, can depend on anything from coffee quality to study environment to proximity to classes. The baristas and managers I spoke to had plans for more food on the menu, more indoor seating and more events catering to students.

"I think it kind of depends on seating and space and outlets, and honestly the bathroom," Beier said. "Our restroom is closed right now, so I feel like our turnover is higher. Also, for the first time we're enforcing a 90-minute table stay per drink that you get. So that affects (students') decisions as well."

As going to a coffee shop becomes more convenient with in-person classes and libraries opening, I wonder how my caffeine habits will be affected. There's debate on whether caffeine dependency can be classified as an **addiction**. Whether considered an addiction or not, my habits, which took root during the pandemic, have the potential to grow stronger in the fall when I have to wake up earlier to get ready and walk to class. I'm also anticipating more late nights at the UgLi, which will mean more money spent buying late-night coffee from Bert's.

"I'm expecting I'll be more tired since I'll be walking more (in the fall), but I won't have as good of access to hot water and tea if I won't be at my apartment all the time," Knittel said. "So I could see it going either way, but I really don't want to form a caffeine dependency, so I hope I drink either the same or less (tea)."

While I am worried about the potential to grow more dependent on caffeine, I'm more excited at the prospect of getting to make a coffee run for everyone at a library table rather than having to sit alone. I look forward to spending hours in a local cafe having meaningful conversations and reflections over a cup of coffee or tea. I look forward to learning more about coffee techniques and flavors from local baristas. Finally, I look forward to gaining a deeper understanding of caffeine's role in daily Ann Arbor life.

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